

Record of Interview



Special Inspector General for
Afghanistan Reconstruction

Project Title and Code:

SIGAR LL-02: Lessons Learned from Aid Coordination in Afghanistan

Interview Code:

[REDACTED]

Date:

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Location:

Washington, DC

Purpose:

To solicit views on international aid coordination

Interviewees:**SIGAR Attendees:**

Grant McLeod, Kate Bateman

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Key Topics:

- Early USG priorities, coordination structure
- Lead nation system
- 2014 focus on elections
- Human development achievements
- Broad lessons learned

Record of Interview

Special Inspector General for
Afghanistan Reconstruction



Early USG priorities, coordination structures

Administration gave Afghanistan relatively low priority; best indicator was the low figure in 2002, \$750 million. Iran actually pledged more than the US did. [KB note: Iran's pledge was slightly more, but for 5 years.] The \$750 million was in fact money that already had been appropriated by Congress, while Taliban was still in power. Amount pledged equaled amount set aside before we overthrew the Taliban. Implication was after the fall of Taliban, there was no difference.

(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C)

AID had its own strategy, largely focused on agriculture. I think from an economic standpoint that made sense, for largest return on investment. AID was not focused on a state/nation-building set of priorities. Karzai quickly asked Bush to reprioritize focusing on large infrastructure, like Ring Road. We should have had a budget large enough for both. AID gave way and agreed to fund infrastructure.

We weren't the largest donor. My view was UN could take the lead, at least convening and overseeing the process. Brahimi planned to keep a relatively low profile and carry out political process and Bonn Agreement. The UN became simply a participant. The mechanism set up was ludicrous on its face, made no sense. Give everyone a role and encourage them to coordinate.

White House asked me if it was ok to characterize our intention on Afghanistan in terms of a Marshall Plan. (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) The assistance budget only increased when Zal went out, and he made that a condition of taking the post.

Donor coordination, lead nation system

I felt the system agreed by donors was unworkable. (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C)

Coordination with 5 chairmen was inefficacious. Most countries had no or minimal representation in Afghanistan. The embassy had about 8 people in December 2001, including 1-2 USAID. Conversation among donors was limited. (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C)

At Tokyo (2002) there was a session on security sector reform (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) The lead nation structure comes out of this. It was good the US did not take the overall lead, even in security sector, given the limited ambitions of the administration at the time. Most institutions - UNDP or WB - had little expertise in SSR. WB said it was outside their scope. Not that the lead nation system was debated in context of other alternatives - there were no others.

Had a more limited set of interested institutions - those that were, felt they had no mandate to do SSR. As far as those chosen, Germans had a historic role in training Afghan police, going back couple decades. Japan said from beginning they were interested in DDR, which was as close as

Record of Interview

Special Inspector General for
Afghanistan Reconstruction



they'd get to SSR. UK and Italy volunteered when called upon. OSCE was involved, did police training.

Does the lead nation system have value for other contingencies? Now there's a larger panoply of institutional relationships that can be applied. World Bank is willing to do more and UN has taken on increased responsibility. African Union in Africa for example. Lead nation concept makes sense, has utility where lead nations are ready to take responsibility. DDR was successful in breaking up most of the large fighting forces in country. However Italians never did much on rule of law.

In Kosovo the lead nation for economic development was the EU - made sense because EU was putting in 75% of the money, might as well give them authority rather than obscure it. I think Kosovo structure is best we've organized so far. Created a sense of hierarchy and order.

If had a larger role for NATO in the beginning - and the US was the main obstacle to that - then the whole SSR in Afghanistan could have been different. As NATO eventually did have that role.

World Bank - UN

World Bank and UN moved toward more cooperation. My impression is the situation has improved. Zoellick was trying hard to have a more collaborative relationship.

NATO - UN

These things tend to be situationally dependent. In Kosovo, NATO would have security responsibility for an interim period, after which UN would take over. It was a county-by-county process. NATO would pull back to a support role, UN would take over fielding police, etc. Intimate cooperation between the two as the hand-off occurred, over a period of years. But again it was a European operation, so full panoply of committed actors. Whereas often, the UN is the only one, so UN has a wider range of responsibilities.

I do think bolstering institutional capabilities among certain institutions - OECD, UN, WB, _[others?] is important.

Later (2014) state of play

By 2014 the system was working reasonably well, countries communicating with each other, higher-level meetings. Priorities were set, though maybe more than were realistic. The highest priority in 2014 was preparing for the elections - and that was largely successful. The machinery had been set up, laws had been passed. In any situation where there are dozens of donors, many with multiple agencies providing assistance and a smaller number of international org's active in the field -- some degree of creative chaos is inevitable.

This tradeoff between coordination and action: there's probably a point of diminishing returns; as coordination goes up, action goes down. Some degree of competition and duplication may be healthy if within limits.

Appreciate the achievements

Record of Interview

Special Inspector General for
Afghanistan Reconstruction



There's not enough recognition of the scale of achievements in Afghanistan - tend to evaluate these programs on reporting and transparency rather than outcomes. In education, massive gains in literacy. In health, gains in longevity. In that respect Afghanistan has given a higher return on investment than almost any other reconstruction effort. From 2002-2012, Afg made more progress in human development than any other country. Econ assistance to countries emerging from conflict has more effect than such assistance to other countries. [KB note: See James Dobbins & Laurel Miller paper, RAND, for more analysis here.] Entire effort, despite difficulties with coordination, has been fairly successful. Though we've not achieved peace, which is the underlying objective.

2014 Elections

(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) most concentrated on elections - securing movement on necessary legal and institutional arrangements that would allow it to go forward. It was a qualified success. But we had close coordination and the recognition that this had to be our highest priority at the time. I don't know enough about the degree to which health and education have been well coordinated. They were a success probably because they appeal to donors and get support.

IDLG

IDLG: example of when GIRA demonstrated success of designing a program that could secure ___[I missed this. Is he perhaps confusing IDLG with NSP?]___. In many ways that's ideal, host nation design and implementation of a program that donors support.

Lessons learned

Is TMAF a successful model? The main problem at the beginning was inadequate resources and particularly American resources. That meant there were many things we couldn't do - build a road or help a farmer. In terms of donor commitment at Tokyo - the US represented something like less than 20% of total. That didn't give us leverage - wasn't until we became a much larger donor with broader scope of interests, when we coordinated more. I think it would have been difficult for Afghans to determine development goals - Ghani had his, but the degree to which that represented broader Afghan consensus was questionable. But certainly the donor community could have organized itself better in the beginning.

State was trying to organize. (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C)

A substantial component of the work focused on donor coordination and allocations of resources to US priorities.

We're on the right track. Stronger institutional capabilities at the international level will facilitate engagement. A substantial financial commitment is required simply to give us sufficient leverage and leadership capability. It's also a question of whether we're willing to coordinate. If we're the dominant donor - and because we're involved on a breadth of activities, we have the broad vision to serve a coordinating function.

There's a problem within the USG of coordinating ourselves and ensuring a dominant voice in interacting with partners. The State/AID relationship had largely been resolved by Obama's 2nd

Record of Interview

Special Inspector General for
Afghanistan Reconstruction



term. The creation of an Assistance Coordinator within both Afg and Pakistan missions - this oversaw not just AID but law enforcement, etc programs - had ensured State and AID were aligned.

The PRT experiment never worked ideally. It was very slow in getting started. I don't think lack of coordination obviated some degree of success, including CERP efforts and US military activity in various forms of economic development - it was mostly useful even in absence of the kind of coordination that would have made it more useful. That type of model can still stand some refinement. The preference is that the military has established some level of security so civilians can circulate freely. In Bosnia and Kosovo we didn't need that kind of coordination between mil and civ efforts - the two could operate autonomously. I think this is a better model.

Follow-up Items

None.